

COSPONSOR THE MCGOVERN-SMITH BILL ON EAST TIMOR

HON. JAMES P. MCGOVERN

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 13, 2000

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, today I am proud to join with my colleague from New Jersey, Congressman CHRIS SMITH, to introduce the East Timor Repatriation and Security Act.

The crisis in East Timor continues, and the Congress needs to respond. Some 100,000 refugees remain trapped in squalid and threatening conditions inside West Timor. The overwhelming majority of these refugees want to return to their homes in East Timor, but cannot because the camps are under the control of the militias. Militias and elements of the Indonesian army continue cross-border attacks into East Timor. Reconstruction continues to be a slow and laborious task.

Our bill maintains the President's suspension on military cooperation with the Indonesian Armed Forces until the refugees are safely repatriated and military attacks against East Timor are ended. It calls upon the President to help the safe repatriation of the refugees and to help rebuild East Timor. And it salutes the members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have participated in the peacekeeping operation in East Timor.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor the McGovern-Smith bill on East Timor and submit additional materials into the RECORD.

EAST TIMORESE REFUGEES FACE NEW THREAT

(NEW YORK, March 30, 2000)—Human Rights Watch today called on Indonesian authorities to lift a March 31 deadline on humanitarian aid to East Timorese refugees living in West Timor. The Indonesian government has given the refugees, some 100,000 people until the end of the month to choose whether to go back to East Timor or remain in Indonesia. Indonesia says it will end all delivery of food and other assistance as of March 31.

"Everyone wants a quick resolution of the refugee crisis, but this ultimatum is counter-productive," said Joe Saunders, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The threatened deadline alone has created panic. If it is implemented, the cutoff will directly endanger the lives of tens of thousands of refugees without solving the underlying problems."

Conditions for many of the refugees are already dire. There have been food shortages, along with health and nutrition problems in many of the camps. Some reports estimate that as many as 500 refugees have died from stomach and respiratory ailments. Refugees also continue to face significant obstacles in deciding whether to return. In some areas, refugees continue to be subjected to intimidation by armed militias and disinformation campaigns. Refugees are told that conditions in East Timor are worse than in the camps, and that the United Nations is acting as a new colonial occupying force. Other refugees opposed independence for East Timor, or come from militia or army families, and fear vigilante justice should they return to East Timor.

Indonesian officials claim, however, that they can no longer afford to feed the refugees, that food aid acts as a magnet and prevents refugees in West Timor from returning home permanently, claiming that after

March 31, the refugees should be the sole responsibility of the international community.

"Given Indonesia's economic woes, the call for international financial support in feeding and caring for the refugees is understandable. We can on donors to make urgently needed assistance available. But an artificial deadline helps no one," said Saunders. "Thousands of refugees are not now in a position to make a free and informed choice about whether to return. A large part of the problem has been Indonesia's failure to create conditions in which refugees can make a genuine choice."

According to aid agencies, the total number of refugees currently in West Timor is just under 100,000. Precise figures are not available because access to the camps and settlements has been limited by harassment and intimidation of humanitarian aid workers by pro-Indonesian militias still dominated in a number of the camps. Many refugees have also been subjected to months of disinformation and, often, intimidation by members of the pro-Indonesian military. Indonesia has recently made some progress in combating the intimidation in the camps, but lack of security and reliable information continue to be imported obstacle to return. Aid workers in West Timor estimate that one-half to two-thirds of the refugees, if given a free choice, would eventually choose to return to East Timor.

"Withdrawal of food aid and other humanitarian assistance should never be used as a means to pressure refugees into returning home prematurely," said Saunders. "Return should be voluntary and based on the first and informed choice of the refugees themselves."

Following the announcement by the United Nations on September 4, 1999 that nearly eighty percent of East Timorese voters had rejected continued rule by Indonesia. East Timor was the site orchestrated mayhem. In the days and weeks following the announcement, an estimated seventy percent of homes and buildings across East Timor were destroyed, more than two-thirds of the population was displaced, and an estimated 250,000 East Timorese fled or were forcibly taken, often at gunpoint, across the border into Indonesian West Timor. To date roughly 150,000 refugees have return to East Timor.

NON-COMMISSIONED AND PETTY OFFICER PAY TABLE EQUITY ACT OF 2000

HON. WALTER B. JONES

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 13, 2000

Mr. JONES of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, today, I am introducing legislation that will provide much needed pay reform for our mid-career non-commissioned officers and petty officers. It is my hope this legislation will accomplish three important steps for the Nation's Armed Forces.

First, it will provide mid-career enlisted service members an increase in their basic pay that will nearly match the increases given to mid-grade commissioned officers beginning July 1, 2000.

Second, it will work to address the problem of retention of qualified and experienced mid-career enlisted noncommissioned and petty officers that the Armed Forces wants to retain.

Third, in retaining qualified and experienced mid-career enlisted service members, it will help maintain the high-level of personnel readiness enjoyed by the Nation's defense posture.

Last year, this Congress in the Fiscal 2000 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) approved a 4.8 percent pay raise for uniformed services personnel, one of the largest increases in recent history. It also authorized pay reform for certain mid-grade commissioned officers and mid-career enlisted service members effective July 1, 2000. While the pay raise itself is a critical step for our military personnel, the pay adjustment unfortunately will miss its mark in offering equitable reform for mid-grade enlisted noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and petty officers (POs) of the Armed Forces in grades E-5, E-6, and E-7.

Whereas, most mid-grade commissioned officers were to receive a well-deserved pay hike on July 1, 2000, mid-career enlisted NCOs and POs are targeted for minimal increases. The July 1, 2000 pay reform will provide for adjustments in 15 of 33 mid-grade officer pay cells, each of which rated increases greater than 4 percent. On the other hand, of the 33 mid-grade enlisted NCO/PO pay cells, only one (1) will receive a raise of 3.5 percent, two (2) are being offered a 3.1 percent increase, one (1) a 2.5 percent hike, and three (3) at 2.1 percent to 2.3 percent. It doesn't require a mathematician to figure out that the enlisted NCOs and POs will be largely left out of the equation.

Most of the military services are experiencing problems either in recruiting and retention, or both. One of the major issues confronting enlisted NCOs and POs is whether they have enough financial resources to care for their family—particularly when they are deployed. Recent surveys indicate that service members are not happy with the pay they're receiving. Recognizing this problem, the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA), a 75-year-old organization of career Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen, prepared a study that demonstrates the value of basic pay for enlisted NCOs and POs has diminished since the advent of the all-volunteer force (AVF). That study, which was distributed to a number of House and Senate members on both the Armed Services Committees and Defense Subcommittees and to selected defense and military officials, proves the value of basic pay for enlisted NCOs and POs has diminished since the advent of the all-volunteer force.

If Congress doesn't want to face the same problem of the late 1970s having too few enlisted petty officers to get its ships to sea, or experiencing another shortage of enlisted NCOs for the Army's combat forces, Congress must address the retention of qualified and experienced mid-career enlisted service members. This pay reform proposal for E-5's, E-6's and E-7's contained in this legislation will take steps to do just that.

Each E-5 with 8 to 26 years of service would receive a \$31 per month increase in basic pay on July 1, 2000. E-6s, in the same years would each realize a monthly increase of \$49, and E-7s a \$56 raise each month. While I believe all of our military should be paid more, this is an important step in the right direction.